New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1947

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK MIRROR — NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK SUN — NEW YORK POST — NEW YORK TIMES

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"The Whole World Over"

DAILY NEWS

MARCH 28, 1947

'Whole World Over' a Friendly Little Comedy From Red Moscow

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Since "The Whole World Over" comes right out of postwar Moscow, I was dutifully present at its premiere last evening at the Biltmore, ready to examine it for propaganda. I can report that it is an insidious jol—for it is an affable little comedy, played with warmth and good nature, which tends to indicate that Muscovites can laugh and love and be laughed at. One of the characters, indeed, is a plotter—a roguish old schemer bent upon engineering a romance between a man and a girl.

The title of the play—Konstantine Simonov, author, and Thelma Schnee, adapter—means that it's the same the whole world over. The "it" is the old boy meets girl stuff, and the postwar housing shortage, and the business of getting soldiers back into civilian life.

One particular soldier, a colonel, comes back to his Moscow apartment to find that it has been allotted during his five-year absence to a professor of engineering and his daughter, a student engineer. The colonel has lost his own wife and child, and the prof thinks his daughter ought to cheer him up.

Buloff's Evening.

The rest is love stuff, with enough small twists of plot and enough other characters to make a pretty amusing evening. Stephen Bekassy and Uta Hagen play the colonel and the girl engagingly; but Joseph Buloff, as the professor, is the one who has the most fun.

Mr. Buloff, you will remember, was the peddler in "Oklahoma" for three years. Now, done up in a beard, spectacles and an oddly cut jacket, just the way actors always are when they are playing Russian professors, Mr. Buloff once again is very funny. He is voluble, his gestures are extravagant, his mugging is slickly timed, and I always enjoy watching him. He has mastered the tricks of his trade.

There is no great urgency in the plot of "The Whole World Over" and once or twice proceedings come almost to a dead halt; but Harold Clurman has directed a nicely chosen company with considerable skill, so that all the people on the stage are likable and entertaining. If you are like me, and do not demand that a Broadway comedy bust your gussets and pop your weskit buttons, you'll have a pleasant evening in a friendly atmosphere. Very clever of those Reds, isn't it—trying to be friendly.

'THE WHOLE WORLD OVER.'

A comedy by Konstantine Simonov, adapted by Thelma Schnee; directed by Harold Clurman; setting and costumes by Ralph Alswang; presented by Walter Fried and Paul F. Moss at the Biltmore Theater Thursday evening, March 27, 1947. The cast:

Feodor Verontsov	Joseph Buloff
Nadya	Beatrice de Neergaard
Olya Verontsov	Uta Hagen
Sergei Sintsin	Sanford Meisner
Basha	Elisabeth Neumann
Stepan Chesnov	Fred Stewart
Dmitri Savelev	Stephen Bekassy
Nicolai Nekin	Michael Strong
Vanya Shpolyanski	George Bartenieff
Colonel Ivanov	Lou Polan
Major Anna Orlov	Jo Van Fleet

Synopsis: The entire action takes place in the apartment of Professor Feodor Verontsov in Moscow shortly after the end of the War. Act I, Scene 1—An early afternoon in autumn. Scene 2—That evening. Scene 3—Late afternoon of the next day. Act II, Scene 1—Evening, two days later. Scene 2—Very late that night.

New York World-Telegram

MARCH 28, 1947

'Whole World Over' A Delightful Comedy

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"The Whole World Over" is as heart-warming a little comedy as you will find in a long time. It has no pretenses of importance. It is simply human and amusing, and has a pleasant flavor that stays with you, and a healthy attitude.

The play is a casual, somewhat rambling account of the settling down of some Russians after the war. The fact that they are Russians has little to do with the case, except that this is one of the pleasantest bits of information to come out of Russia since the shooting ended.

There is only the slightest of plots. What there is is no more than a framework on which to hang the emotions, relations and ambitions of the characters.

No Complex Emotions.

Feodor is an architect of bridges, a middle-aged man who has fought in the army for three weeks. Happily free of any complex emotions, his approach to living is to simply get what you think you want. He won his wife in three days, and, with all due consideration of others, he has been operating on that plan ever since.

His daughter Olya is about to become a graduate engineer. Her fiance has been killed and, despairing of love, she is about to marry a frustrated architect who really is fonder of her father's advice than of her.

They have been assigned after a bombing to live in the home of Dmitri, a colonel who has built bridges for the army. He is as embittered as Olya, having lost his wife and child.

The play tells how these and other characters gradually come to life in the homely friction with each other.

Finding Their Goals.

It is not a chronicle of events so much as the rubbing off of one person's consideration or gratitude on another. These people are selfish only in their confusion and their fear of being hurt. Feodor is inclined to talk a lot and answer his own questions, but he knows what is right for them. His method is to connive until each of them finds out for himself what he really wants and does something about it.

His daughter is very much like him, but has herself in an emotional knot. Their relationship is one of the nicest things in the play.

Joseph Buloff does a grand easy job of making Feodor a human and practical old manipulator. He is clear-thinking, humorous, impatient and a tower of strength around the home.

Mistress of Emotion.

As Olya, Uta Hagen is not only a very lovely looking student but a mistress of comic emotion. Her battle in the last scene between vanishing love and what she calls ethics is a delight to watch.

Stephen Bekassy is a handsome Dmitri and effectively manages the pendulum changes in the stern colonel who warms up in the light of love. As the sycophant architect Sanford Meisner gives a humorous picture of a weakling.

The smaller roles are all done well. There is Fred Stewart as a naive superintendent, and Beatrice De Neergaard as his wife who refuses to cook. There is Michael Strong as an actor who knows how bad he is, and Elisabeth Neumann as the wry sister of Feodor.

George Bartenieff is a touching young corporal, Jo Van Fleet a brusque surgeon who wants romance, and Lou Polan an effusive colonel whose joy with peace is uninhibited.

This is a rambling play, not a crisp one. Its humor is of character rather than wise crack. It can slow down without dragging, and its mood is faithful.

The New York Times

MARCH 28, 1947

THE PLAY

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In "The Whole World Over," which was acted at the Biltmore last evening, Konstantine Simonov, the Soviet litterateur, endorses love. With the assistance of Joseph Buloff, the well-known dramatic buffoon, Mr. Simonov's comedy appears here in an adaptation by Thelma Schnee. To bourgeois theatregoers who like style as well as love, "The Whole World Over" is hardly more than an amiable assembly of dramatic spare parts; and the performance under Harold Clurman's direction has the subtlety of a Tammany clambake.

* * *

But the defects of Mr. Simonov's amateurish charade point the way to its virtues, which came straight from the heart and are disarming. For the Soviet citizens he has tossed together in a Moscow apartment are conspicuously likable people. Naïve in its craftsmanship, "The Whole World Over" manages somehow to retain the hospitality, sentiment and generosity of Soviet people, particularly when they settle down to a midnight party. In the last act Mr. Simonov disposes of his dramatic problems and unites his lovers with all the conventional romance of an old-fashioned musical comedy.

On the one hand, you have a sad and laconical colonel who is a hero, silently mourning his family lost in the war. On the other hand, you have a professor's daughter mourning a hero who never returned. She is engaged to a young architect who is in love with his career. Old as he is, the professor understands that the daughter ought to marry the sad colonel, and by a number of sly stratagems he provokes it. But not until Mr. Simonov has run through the entire bourgeois formula of boy meets girl, boy loses girl and boy gets girl at the curtain.

The plot also includes the pretty device of prompting the girl to do the proposing. For the colonel is really a shy, lonely, tongue-tied hero—romantic at heart but martial. After he marries the professor's daughter, it is devoutly to be hoped that his lost family does not turn up from some DP camp in Germany. "The Whole World Over" is a trifle hazy on that unromantic point, and bigamy also is frowned upon the whole world over.

* * *

Mr. Buloff is a might-funny fellow who knows all the tricks of popular comedy. As the sapient professor he is apparently wearing the same spectacles he wore in "Call Me Ziggy," a squalid farce of some years ago; and he peers over them, hunches down for exits, waves his hands and runs up and down the vocal scales in a style that always wins laughs for him. Call it practiced acting by an experienced trouper.

Stephen Bekassy plays the melancholy colonel with considerable valor, when the plot does not make him too sheepish, for Mr. Bekassy is a handsome, sincere actor with an excellent voice. As the nubile daughter Uta Hagen gives a pleasant performance worthy of a more responsive lover. Sanford Meisner runs easily through the supercilious part of the preoccupied architect.

There are agreeable performances by Beatrice de Neergaard, Lou Polan, Michael Strong, Fred Stewart, Elizabeth Neumann, Jo Van Fleet and George Bartenieff. As scene designer Ralph Alswang has arranged a roomy apartment suitable for an academician. In "The Whole World Over" Mr. Simonov endorses love with all the sophomoric conventions, seasoning them a little with the simple friendliness of Russian people.

New York Post

MARCH 28, 1947

Story of Moscow Life In Pleasant Comedy

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Under the assumption, regarded with disapproval in various quarters, that Soviet Russians are human beings, the new comedy at the Biltmore Theatre tells the warm and unpretentious story of some friendly and engaging citizens of postwar Moscow facing the problems of demobilization, housing and romance in their overcrowded capital. That is the only point which even the most suspicious enemy of the Kremlin could look on as propaganda in the highly non-political play by Konstantine Simonov that Thelma Schnee has adapted under the title of "The Whole World Over."

In Miss Schnee's version, the comedy is neither sturdy nor striking in its plot or its ideas, nor is it without its ups and downs as dramatic narrative. Assuredly there are times when it seems almost frail enough to disappear altogether. Yet its people are so pleasant, their adventures so human and the whole atmosphere so charming and, to use a phrase that has been known to scare away potential playgoers, heart-warming that "The Whole World Over" proves to be a fresh and extraordinarily likable work in its disarmingly modest fashion.

Charm is perhaps its most impressive and surprising feature, and it must be added in all fairness that there are occasions when both the play and its actors tend to grow just a trifle excessive in their emphasis on this particular quality. On the whole, though, the charm arises, not from any grim striving, but from the genuine and forthright humanity that has gone into the creation of its characters.

Although, as the title suggests, the point of "The Whole World Over" is the similarity of the Russian people and their problems to those of other lands, the comedy, at least for one who has not been in the Soviet Union since 1935, is pleasantly successful in capturing the humor, earnestness, friendliness and expansive exuberance of the Muscovite. Indeed, the very quality of credible Slavic warmth that is the play's chief virtue is likely to cause hostile observers here and there to eye it with alarm.

Portrait Gallery

The story, which deals with the efforts of an ancient professor to get his daughter to marry a young officer rather than an earnest architectural student, is fortunately of little importance. What counts is the portrait gallery of contemporary Russians which the play has assembled; the old professor himself, his serious-minded daughter, the earnest young engineering officer, the apartment house superintendent, the teen-aged corporal, the soldier who wanted to be an actor, the officer who has been away from home five years, and the rest of them. They are just about the season's most attractive characters.

The acting is excellent, with Joseph Buloff, turning up after a career in "Oklahoma!" to play the professor with his customary exuberant charm and humor, leading the rest. Uta Hagen is particularly good as the heroine and Stephen Bekassy is an attractive and believable Soviet officer. Although there should be a special word for George Bartenieff as the boy corporal, Fred Stewart as the superintendent and Lou Polan as the colonel who has been so long absent from home, all of the playing is helpful. "The Whole World Over" is slender and modest but it has life, freshness and good humor.

New York Herald Tribune

MARCH 28, 1947

= By HOWARD BARNES =

No Veto Here

A COMEDY of rich substance and feeling has come to the Biltmore from the U. S. S. R. "The Whole World Over" is a happy ambassador from a country which can use one at the moment. Written by Konstantine Simonov, the author of "Days and Nights," it is a beguiling reminder that there are solid common denominators of contemporary existence. In recounting a romantic mix-up in a Moscow apartment, caused by the housing shortage, it creates a wonderful fund of sustained humor. By touching wisely on the human problems of reconversion from war to peace, it underlines gayety with provocative meaning. Served by a resourceful company, brilliantly headed by Joseph Buloff, this play from behind the "iron curtain" makes a handsome crack in it.

* * *

Simonov has no truck with isms or ideologies in "The Whole World Over." He is intensely and even fervently Russia in his marshaling of characters and his juxtaposition of situations, but that is as it should be. The illuminating quality of his piece is the fact that the people are recognizable and sympathetic and that their problems are much the same as ours. To put it briefly, the Biltmore offering is an extremely amusing and engaging piece of theater, part of the universal pool of high comedy. The loquacious and knowing old architect, who sets a grieving daughter, a melancholy colonel and a silly protege straight to meet a brave new world, is the

center of merriment and hard-boiled philosophy, but the piece generates all sorts of tangential fun.

• • •

What distinguishes it immeasurably is the fact that the author has rarely relied on contrived farcical situations to spring his action. There is a ludicrous scene in which the testy Vorontsov keeps an imminent and unwelcome son-in-law planning cities while his daughter and the war-weary colonel have a chance to care for each other. There is an entrancing passage when a captain friend of the colonel's arrives in the over-crowded apartment and turns out to be a woman very much in love with the hero. Delightful characters, such as a boy corporal and an army officer from Smolensk, punctuate the proceedings with captivating bits. In the ending, praise be, the people of the play work out their own destinies with good-natured dignity.

• • •

The acting capitalizes on the comedy at every turn of the script. Buloff is immense as Vorontsov, reverting from science and wisdom to peasant outbreaks with vast effect and giving the Simonov lines just the proper emphasis. Uta Hagen is excellent as the daughter about to become an engineer, who mourns a lover lost in the war but finds a new one who needs her desperately. Stephen Bekassy plays the stony-faced colonel with fine restraint and has several telling moments as he remembers the killing of his wife and child by the Nazis. As the floundering young city planner Sanford Meisner plays a difficult role superbly, and Lou Polan, Beatrice de Neergaard, Michael Strong and George Bartenieff are among the others who give the comedy an eloquent interpretation. Harold Clurman's staging is perceptive and the Ralph Alswang settings and costumes are perfectly appropriate. Without knowing anything about it, one suspects that Simonov owes a lot to his adapter, Thelma Schnee. In any case, "The Whole World Over" is a great gift of laughter to Broadway from those curious Russians.

Daily Mirror

MARCH 28, 1947

'Whole World Over' Hilarious in Spots

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Konstantine Simonov's comedy, "The Whole World Over," which arrived at the Biltmore Theatre last evening under the sponsorship of Walter Fried and Paul F. Moss, might well be subtitled, "Or Love Will Find a Way."

Translated by Thelma Schnee, it's a Russian version of the American "Boy Meets Girl, etc." formula. Only in this case, it's the girl who gets the boy. And the boy is an Army colonel, 41, and ready for demobilization.

Colonel Dmitri Savelev returns to his Moscow apartment to find it occupied by Feodor Vorontsov, famous architect, and his pretty daughter Olya, an engineering student and the betrothed of Sergei Sinitsin, a timid would-be designer of cities.

Vorontsov immediately decides his daughter should shed the incompetent Sergei and wed the handsome Colonel. But the Colonel is a dour fellow, living in the past, mourning a wife and daughter killed during the war.

It takes the determined Vorontsov two acts and five scenes to shoo away Sergei and unite his daughter and the Colonel. It also takes a resourceful performance by Joseph Buloff to keep the comedy from bogging down into utter bladerdash.

There are few comedians in our theatre who know how to steal a scene as shrewdly and effectively as Buloff. As the practical and irresistible Vorontsov, he has a field day for himself.

The comedy's main asset, in fact, is its cast. Stefan Bekassy, who came to Broadway via Budapest and Hollywood, is good-looking, ingratiating, skillful. He plays the colonel with admirable restraint and considerable charm. Charm, like clever, can be a patronizing word, but we use it to describe Bekassy in its most complimentary sense.

Lou Polan also scores with a robust performance as an exhuberant, bearish army officer. Uta Hagan is delightful as the girl. And there are other capable contributions by Fred Stewart, Michael Strong Beatrice de Neergaard, Sanford Meisner, Elisabeth Neumann, George Bartenieff and Jo Van Fleet.

Director Harold Clurman has paced the play swiftly, and Ralph Alswarg has devised a helpful production.

Thanks to Buloff, Bekassy and associates, "The Whole World Over," seems at times to be a much more amusing piece than it really is. They make the most of its virtues and deftly camouflage its defects.

"The Whole World Over," in sum, boasts some hilarious episodes, but not sufficient for a winner in the exacting Broadway stake race.

It is interesting as a study in Russian dramaturgy. But we just happen to handle such romantic trifles more adroitly over here. When it comes to machine-made comedy, you can't beat the American production line.

PM

MARCH 30, 1947

Kronenberger

A Slightly Thin Comedy About Post-War Moscow

PM Reviews

The Simonov play that Thelma Schnee has adapted from the Russian is as lacking in political propaganda as *Black Beauty*. It is just a comedy about people in Moscow, given to showing that love, housing shortages and post-war readjustments are the same the whole world over. Much of the play is pleasant and likeable, but more of it is footloose and frail. Apparently writers of lightweight comedy, in the doodabs they resort to and the doldrums they can't escape from, are the same the whole world over, too.

• • •

The play's strong points are its characters and its atmosphere. While chronicling the routine vexations of a romance between a professor's daughter and a demobilized colonel, Simonov fills the professor's apartment with friendly and often entertaining people. They come and go, they talk, they sing, they reminisce, they drink toasts. The war has touched most of their lives, including the two lovers', but the scars are healing and the future beckons. Much the most amusing character is the professor himself, a benevolent meddler who promotes his daughter's romance by decoying her stodgy, self-absorbed architect-fiance into a world of blueprints.

• • •

All these people make for a nice sense of warmth; for a kindly atmosphere that, if it seems a little contrived, yet remains the play's most winning contrivance. For *The Whole World Over* doesn't get much support in the way of plot, or show much skill in its way of handling it. Which tosses the burden back on the household doings, the shifting incidents, the exiters and entrancers. And their ins and outs are also full of ups and downs; and eventually of more downs than ups. When a play has no real sustaining interest, it must live brightly in the moment, and keep brightly alive from one moment to the next. But in *The Whole World Over* I found too many moments slow, or thin, or too much the same. And likeable as the people are, they are substantially stage-characters; and stage-characters tend to wear down when they're merely on display.

• • •

Mr. Clurman's staging is extremely helpful, and so is much of the acting. Joseph Buloff plays the professor with great zest and humor. Uta Hagen is an agreeable heroine and Stephen Bekassy an attractive colonel. Sanford Meisner manages to give shrewd comedy outlines to the rather stock role of the fiance, and Jo Van Fleet is good, and Lou Polan very good, in smaller parts. There is a properly cluttered set by Ralph Alswang.

—Louis Kronenberger

The Sun

MARCH 28, 1947

'The Whole World Over' Sparse Comedy, but It Has Some Amusing Scenes.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

There are some amusing characters and scenes in "The Whole World Over," Thelma Schnee's adaptation of Konstantine Simonov's comedy of war-jolted Russians, but it's a play that sags and lags; it doesn't hold together for a full evening. The first performance was given last night at the Biltmore.

Post-war life in Moscow is depicted in the Simonov comedy, which lets us know that the housing shortage is by no means confined to New York. The Professor of the play, a crochety old architect, given to gabbling and fixing other people's lives, is living with his daughter and retinue in an apartment that formerly belonged to an Army Colonel. The officer returns at the war's end, bringing along comrades from the front, and it doesn't take long to bring the Colonel and the pretty daughter of the Professor together romantically.

There is a great deal of warmth and geniality, along with vodka drinking, in "The Whole World Over." It is a likable play for much of the way, but it is too sparse, too straggling, to be accepted as a satisfactory one. The first portion of the Simonov-Schnee comedy is much better than the second; it's in the second that the material runs down, along with the characters, and things become rather farcical and clamorous.

Some good performances develop from the proceedings upon the Biltmore's stage. Joseph Buloff plays the fussy, meddling, pipe-smoking, career-fixing old professor and he makes a character—sometimes too much of a character—of Feodor Vorontsov. Buloff frequently goes right back into his act as Ali Hakim, the Persian peddler of "Oklahoma!" (and a good act that was), and he has numerous scenes in which he is very funny. Stephan Bekassy, making his New York debut, is excellent as the Colonel who finds love unexpectedly, and so is Uta Hagen of the beautiful voice and a Desdemona of other years, now playing the daughter.

Lou Polan gives genuine feeling to the role of a Red Army officer homeward bound after a bitter war to join his wife and children, who have been living in a cave. George Bartenieff is very amusing as a diminutive, teen-age corporal, who gets his neck washed for the first time in years and is bewildered and delighted with a world at peace. There is good ensemble playing from Fred Stewart, Elisabeth Neumann and Beatrice de Neergaard. Sanford Meisner does well enough as a striving architect, a suitor who gets jilted.

The new comedy has been brought into the Biltmore by Walter Fried and Paul F. Moss. Harold Clurman has staged the piece competently and Ralph Alswang has contributed an atmospheric and livable room. "The World Over" offers a measure of entertainment, but it is a comedy that is definitely undernourished and decidedly meager.

Journal American

MARCH 28, 1947

'Whole World Over' On Stage at Biltmore

By ROBERT GARLAND

Eleven characters were in search of a play last night at the Biltmore. The drama-quest began about a quarter after eight. It continued until almost ten-thirty. Then, success being as far away as ever, everybody called the whole thing off. The audience went home. The actors went wherever actors go after a frustrated first performance.

The eleven characters were kindly, if somewhat gaga, people. Russians, you know, gathering in Moscow at the apartment occupied by Prof. Feodor Vorontsov. Brain-children of Konstantine Simonov, adopted for America by Thelma Schnee, and brought to Broadway by Messrs. Fried and Moss, the vehicle of their importation is "The Whole World Over."

Mr. Simonov has a way with characters, as his "Days and Nights," the Book-of-the-Month Club selection for 1945, and his "The Russian People," produced by The Theatre Guild in 1942, have already proven. But having created them between the covers of a book or behind the footlights of a stage, he walks away and leaves them disastrously on their own.

Especially behind the footlights of a stage where, when they speak to one another, it is as if they were making it up as they go along the pedestrian path to nowhere in particular.

• • •

All Said, Nothing Done

On the surface, "The Whole World Over" has to do with the postwar housing situation. In Moscow, as on Manhattan, the postwar housing situation is a sorry one. Looking for an apartment in the Russian capital is like looking for a Christian in the Kremlin. Even a returned soldier, high and mighty with vodka and other decorations, knows better than to try.

Any number of Konstantine Simonov's eleven characters are returned soldiers. Stepan Cheezov is one. Dmitri Savelev is another. Nicolai Nekin is the nicest of them all. Nicolai once was an actor. And now the war is over, he wants to return to his acting. He can sing, too. A lit'le number called "To the Futu.e!", with music by I. Dunaevski.

There're also women soldiers. Especially Major Anna Orlov, who loves all the other soldiers a la Russe. These, and the talkative old Prof. Vorontsov, his lovelorn daughter, Olya, and the customary Nadyas, Sergeis, Sashas, Vanyas and Dmitris, come and go in the professor's apartment which, after all has been said and nothing done, turns out to be a colonel's.

That's all there is, which makes the final curtain a welcome event at the Biltmore. Nice, quaint, kind-hearted people certainly can be dull. Especially when they're make-believe Russians.

• • •

Imported Talkfest

If there's propaganda in the imported talkfest which is not for long in 47th st., you'll find it in the words about everybody—including the Russians—getting out of uniform, and in the lyrics—written by Harold Rome—of the "To the Future" song. Personally, I understood neither the reference nor the singing. If necessary, maybe the FBI will.

First among the inhabitants of "The Whole World Over" is the Dmitri Savelev of Stephen Bekassy. Mr. Bekassy, who comes to Broadway via Budapest, Beverly Hills and "Errand for Bernice," has the proud, provocative, dirty look James Mason is supposed to have, but hasn't! Then there's Michael Strong, a charming Nicolai, and George Bartenieff, a boyish corporal.

Joseph Buloff is scarcely out of "Oklahoma" as the pivotal professor about whom the ten other characters revolve. But slowly! Sanford Meisner is as Meisnerian as ever as the Sergei Sinitsin who is something of a slacker. The women characters are less likable than the men. Most bearable is the Major Anna Orlova of Jo Van Fleet. She's been around...

"The Whole World Over" is neither comedy, tragedy nor a good Red propaganda piece. It's merely eleven Russian characters in search of a play in which to pass an evening.

"Bathsheba"

New York Post

MARCH 27, 1947

The Screen's Mr. Mason In Local Stage Debut

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

James Mason, the tempestuous thespian of the Thames, took his bold and much heralded leap from screen to stage at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre last night in a biblical whatnot called "Bathsheba," but the results were not exciting. The latest of the visiting Englishmen proved to be a handsome and vigorous young man, with an agreeable enough stage presence, but his acting equipment was certainly not sufficiently dynamic to give life to a play which, among other things, was greatly in need of vitality.

Out-of-town reports indicated that during the tryouts there was something of a struggle between Jacques Duval, the author, who wanted his work played for tragedy, and Mr. Mason, who thought it should be done as comedy. It was further suggested that in the battle the star was victorious, but my impression last night was that some sort of compromise must have been effected. At least it appeared that everyone had agreed to present "Bathsheba" in a manner that would bring out neither its tragedy nor its comedy.

Whitewash for David

The author's purpose seems to have been to whitewash the biblical King David in the notorious matter of his treatment of the brave captain, Uriah. It will be remembered that the conduct of the great but morally unstable king in seducing the wife of his faithful soldier and sending the husband to die in battle was regarded with considerable disapproval in the Old Testament. Duval's idea is that it wasn't David's fault.

According to the play, Uriah was an idiotic young zealot so fanatically loyal to his king that he took an oath not to touch Bathsheba, his loving wife, until the enemy city of Rabah had fallen. That took a lot of months and in the interval the neglected Bathsheba and the handsome David fell in love. Since they were not only conscience-stricken but found that Bathsheba was going to have a baby, David made every effort to get the stubborn Uriah to forget his oath and go back to his wife. His efforts to persuade the reluctant husband to return to Bathsheba, by the way, are what is supposed to supply the comedy.

In the end the king tells Uriah the truth but that fatuous youth is so blind with devotion to his ruler that he refuses to believe it, feeling that David is merely testing his loyalty. Thereupon the saddened monarch, who really loves the young man dearly, seeing that Uriah would prefer death to disillusionment and that, anyway, Bathsheba would have to be stoned if the facts came out, reluctantly sends the brave captain to his destruction. It isn't a very convincing defense, and it is presented dully, flatly and with an almost total lack of drama.

Mr. Mason is neither very good nor very bad as David, and a report on his capacity as a stage actor must be delayed until he gets a better play and a sterner director. His wife, Pamela Kellino, is not happily cast in the title role, but Phil Arthur, who should be long cherished for his portrayal of the collegiate naval lieutenant in "A Bell for Adano," is effective as Uriah, and Hildy Parks brings a welcome note of vivacity to the part of an amorous girl captive. Stewart Chaney's sets and costumes are handsome and helpful. "Bathsheba," though, is tedious theatre-going.

'BATHSHEBA.'

Play by Jacques Deval; staged by Coby Ruskin; settings, costumes and lighting by Stewart Chaney; production supervised by Sylvia Friedlander; presented by Maximilian Becker and Lee K. Holland, in association with Sylvia Friedlander, at the Barrymore Theater Wednesday evening, March 26, 1947.

The cast:

Gershoum	Martin Ashe
Hiram	Carleton Scott Young
Joab	Rusty Lane
Manasseh	Paul Donah
Shari	Hildy Parks
Uriah	Phil Arthur
Nisiah	Leonore Rae
Aroussia	Blanche Zohar
David	James Mason
Ghazil	Horace Braham
Obram	Michael Shy
Nathan	Thomas Chambers
Hanoufati	Maud Scheerer
Agreb	Joseph Tomes
Bathsheba	Pamela Kellino
Sourah	Patricia Robbins
Micale	Jane Middleton
Rahila	Barbara Brooke
Orphie	Lenka Peterson
Lady-in-waiting	Vega Keane

SYNOPSIS: Time—During the summer of the year 1030 B. C. Act I, Scene 1—Joab's tent before Rabah. Scene 2—Top terrace of King David's palace in Jerusalem. Two days later. Scene 3—The same. One hour later. Scene 4—The same. Two months later. Act II, Scene 1—Uriah's tent before Rabah. Two days later. Scene 2—The King's terrace. The next day. Scene 3—The same. The next morning. ACT III, Scene 1—The same. The next day. Scene 2—The same. A week later.

PM

MARCH 28, 1947

Kronenberger

Even With James Mason 'Bathsheba' Is a Bore

PM Reviews

As an attempt to rewrite the Bible, *Bathsheba* is magnificently unsuccessful. Nor is it notably better as a chance to see James Mason plain. Not only will you see him bearded, but the role of David is either too taxing or not taxing enough to reflect Mr. Mason's special cinema talents at their brightest. Mr. Mason is all right, but that's hardly enough when the play is all wrong.

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Bathsheba is all wrong because it's tedious, and has none of the suppleness of good theater. It's all wrong, again, because it's tasteless, and has none of the integrity of good playwriting. We need not blame Mr. Deval for freely enlarging upon what, after all, is a quite brief Bible story. We need not quarrel with him for introducing more Gallic irony than Biblical morality. But when we find him attempting drama one moment and comedy the next, capitalizing all he can on a spicy situation, and generally milking his story for whatever it may yield, we feel he is merely wasting our time. All that is proved, indeed, is that when it comes to being vulgar, a simple mind is just no match for a "sophisticated" one.

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In re-telling the tale of how King David coveted the wife of Uriah, got her with child, and ordered her husband to be killed in battle, Mr. Deval has given a new twist to its morality. The David of *Bathsheba* is a worldling and a realist who, having wronged Uriah, does all he can to straighten matters out, preferably without Uriah's knowing anything was ever amiss. But Uriah is a complete idealist given to lofty vows, a priggish innocent, a Biblical boy scout, whom David reluctantly orders killed out of kindness; for if the truth were compelled upon Uriah, the tragedy would be infinitely greater.

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The familiar attitude that Deval has superimposed on the old Bible story, that intransigent idealism often causes more harm than sane worldliness, that there is much to be said in favor of sinners and much to be said in dispraise of saints, is in itself perfectly good. But Mr. Deval, beyond doubling back at the end to give David a good stern Scriptural blast, refuses to treat his point of view with respect. He shifts levels and tones, writes for laughs, keeps a pretty steady eye on sex. And all this not only robs his play of dignity, it cuts down on what little there is of drama; the mood is forever snapping. But at best most of the play could only plod along. It has moments, but far too much of it is dull and desperately makeshift.

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Mr. Mason's David is certainly not very grand or Biblical, but since Mr. Deval's isn't either, Mr. Mason can be credited with an easy performance, quite free from theatrics. The rest of the cast is far from notable, though Phil Arthur's Uriah is a faithful portrayal of what happens to be an intensely irritating role. But Pamela Kellino's Bathsheba is frankly a washout, and none of the other performances are better than adequate. — LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York World-Telegram

MARCH 27, 1947

Mason Makes Bow In a Biblical Drama

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

When James Mason made his third act entrance with a white robe over his silver armor in "Bathsheba" last night, he was greeted with the sort of whistle generally reserved for Betty Grable.

This is indicative of his popularity. At this particular point in his career he could probably undertake the title role in "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm" and find an audience.

Instead he has chosen to portray the biblical figure of David in a rather uncertain document that emphasizes the King's libido.

There are all the makings of a great tragedy in David's story. Having cuckolded Uriah, the King finds that the young soldier's adoration of his regent will not allow him to believe the truth. Since Bathsheba is to have a child, instead of letting Uriah suffer inevitable disillusion, David sends him to a proud soldier's death.

David a Languid Satyr.

In order to have this barbaric decision mean much, the character of David must have stature and magnificence. Here he is a languid satyr. About the only action he performs is to toss a ring over to Bathsheba's house with his slingshot. About himself, he remarks that he knows a thousand ways to love one woman, but there is only one way to love a thousand of them.

The play has an undecisive mood, with its smart conversation about sex offering little preparation for the tragic end.

Mason cuts an undeniably handsome figure on the stage. He moves gracefully and maintains a calm authority in a marathon of a role.

On the debit side, he seems always to be acting externally. Appropriate as his gestures and readings are, he never moves you deeply, nor really makes the King live.

Real Matinee Idol.

The star has a trick of saying all his lines in that familiar nasal snarl, which could do with variations of tone. None of this is as important as the fact that he is the closest thing to a real matinee idol the theater has. He is the romantic combination of spectacular looks and scorn to burst feminine hearts.

Pamela Kellino, the real life Mrs. Mason, plays the relatively tiny role of Bathsheba. She has not enough scenes to prove much, one way or the other, about the lady's fatal charm. Lovely of coloring, she yet does not seem a historically fatal beauty.

She is inclined to attack the role with a delicacy that suggests the guards keep her hopped up with the hasheesh and lotus wine with which they prepared her for her original meeting with the King.

A Loyal Soldier.

Phil Arthur is the radiantly loyal soldier, Uriah. He gives the impression that he would have been elected the typical Jerusalem boy, and the most likely to succeed of his regiment, which is just about what Uriah was.

Horace Braham makes Ghazil a figure of mature affection as David's first courtier, and Thomas Chalmers is imposing as Nathan.

The play has been exquisitely costumed and set by Stewart Chaney, with a warm richness of color that does not obviously reveal its luxury until the final line up of all the characters for the curtain call.

"Bathsheba" as a play is not particularly successful or significant. But the main purpose of the production is to get James Mason on the stage. That it does, and keeps him there.

DAILY NEWS

MARCH 27, 1947

James Mason Makes Mild Debut In a Dullish Biblical Sex Comedy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The Old Testament is a handy source-book for sex drama, and Jacques Deval has turned to it for his new play, "Bathsheba," which was presented at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre last evening in a lovely, sunny, spacious setting designed by Stewart Chaney. Mr. Deval's success is slight, for he has achieved no better than a tedious account of what must have been a notable adultery.

"Bathsheba" is the vehicle chosen by a British player, James Mason, for his debut on a metropolitan stage. Mr. Mason appeared last evening to be not as good as John Gielgud and not as bad as Donald Wolfit. He seemed to be an actor of pleasant appearance but limited resource—his chief limitations being a stiffness of manner and a monotony of voice.

King Gets Girl.

Mr. Mason portrays a rather cinematic monarch, David O. David, the original sling-shot expert and psalm-singing son of a gun. He bids his henchmen to hench and his wenches to wench and none must say him no. Indeed, an underling has to go to considerable lengths to show his subservience. One of them, who merely wants to wait inside, has to inquire, "may I await your orders within the palace?" This is a sample of the way Mr. Deval writes.

In the story, King David, tiring of trying to boost his ASCAP rating and weary of feeding candy to his female musicians, looks over the wall of his palace terrace and beholds, at a nearby house, one Bathsheba. He seizes his slingshot—doubtless the same one with which he bagged Goliath—and for a moment it looks as though he would knock her off that way. But no; henchmen fetch her, drugged with a mild potion of hashish and soda water.

Some Good Help.

Bathsheba is a nice girl and the wife of a loyal captain in David O. David's army, one Uriah; but she goes for David just the same and is swiftly placed in an interesting condition. The unsuspecting Uriah arrives, with only the one thought of adoring his king, and Mr. Deval tries to make quite a situation out of this. I think, however, that the scenario is better recounted in the Bible, and if the movies want it it is in the public domain.

In the company supporting Mr. Mason in his rather tremulous debut I like best the work of Phil Arthur as the infinitely adoring Uriah; of Thomas Chalmers as that bearded prophet, Nathan; of Rusty Lane, playing a General Eisenhower of 1030 B. C.; of Jane Middleton, Mr. Mason's saucy-looking queen, and of Hildy Parks as a cute captive wench.

Pamela Kellino (Mrs. Mason) enacts the title role a little as though that hashish drink never did wear off, and Horace Braham brings profound solemnity to the part of a head henchman. And, as I indicated in the beginning, Mr. Chaney's setting is excellent.

Daily Mirror

MARCH 27, 1947

'Bathsheba' Is Dull, Verbose Play

By ROBERT COLEMAN

In "Bathsheba" Jacques Deval has taken one of the great Biblical stories and reduced it to pygmy stature. It is the story of King David and his infatuation for the beautiful Bathsheba.

After slaying Goliath and succeeding Saul as King of Judah, David, in his later years, became a bored man. Even drink and a large harem failed to bring him pleasure and peace.

Then one evening from the balcony of his palace he glimpsed Bathsheba bathing in her garden and had the courtier Ghazil bring her to him. Soon she was with child. And to complicate matters, David discovered that she was the wife of young Uriah, a brave warrior in his army before Rabah, who had won his admiration and affection.

David summoned Uriah from the front so that he might think himself the father of Bathsheba's child and spare her the fate of an adultress, stoning by the populace or death at a betrayed husband's hand.

But noble Uriah had taken an oath of chastity till he had been victorious in battle. So David had him lead a futile charge and meet a warrior's death. Along with news of Uriah's death, David also heard that his own two profligate sons had met sordid deaths.

But God had not deserted David. The prophet Nathan predicted that his child of Bathsheba would die, but that they should have another son, Solomon, who would complete the Temple in Jerusalem.

Deval has retold his fascinating story in terms little more distinguished than a bedroom farce.

Missing is the beauty of language that one finds in the Bible. The result is a dull, verbose play that gets cheap laughs when it should be dramatic and absorbing.

Star James Mason is said to have argued with the producers, Maxmillian Becker, Lee K. Holland nd Sylvia Friedlander, that "Bathsheba" should be played for comedy rather than drama, Coby Ruskin, who succeeded Robert Gordon as director on the road, evidently accepted Mason's opinion.

Mason acts King David with a startling and disturbing nasal drawl, little majesty and authority. His wife, Pamela Kellino, is a beautiful but negative Bathsheba. Phil Arthur is a boyish, pedestrian Uriah.

Horace Braham, Thomas Chalmers and Carleton Scott young, of all the large cast, acquitted themselves most creditably as Ghazil, Nathan and Hiram. They almost made Deval's lacklustre prose sound poetic and important. Quite an achievement.

Stewart Chaney has designed a handsome production.

Both "Bathsheba" and star Mason prove disappointments. We doubt that New York will reverse the verdicts of Princeton and Philadelphia, where the customers emphatically turned thumbs down.

Personally, we're just going to wipe what transpired at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre last evening from memory and turn to the Bible for its eloquent, tragic telling of the story of King David and the beauteous Bathsheba.

Journal American

MARCH 27, 1947

'Bathsheba' Offered At the Barrymore

By ROBERT GARLAND.

The ardent Philadelphia amateur who, stepping last week onto the Forrest Theatre stage, told James Mason that his performance in "Bathsheba" stinks, was unfair to organized dramatic criticism. Not only was he talking out of turn, he was guilty also of overstatement. Mr. Mason's playacting in Jacques Deval's biblical melodrama does not stink. Believe me, it does nothing as definite as that.

Surely a scrapple-minded Philadelphian is aware that a whiff of imported English ham is no unpleasant odor. Thanks most recently to Donald Wolfit's stopover at the Century, we New Yorkers are acclimated to such porcine visitations. And where Mr. Wolfit's ham-and-Shakespeare was elderly and tired and definitely unappealing, Mr. Mason's ham-and-Deval is young and fresh and surprisingly disarming.

At the Barrymore, there is an engaging amateur quality about James Mason's theatricals. It is as if some stage-struck youngster from the halls of learning or the corridors of the motion-picture studios had decided to play theatre. Raising himself some whiskers, borrowing his mother's housegowns, reviving the ancient scandal about David, Uriah and Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, he put on a show...

He put it on for his own amazement, as Ed Wynn used to say. And if people are willing to pay good money to come to see it, that is their business.

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Story Goes On and On

BUSINESS was better than good last night in 47th Street. And it was better also than the behavior of an unruly portion of the initial congregation. There was loud laughter in the wrong places. There were whistled depreciations of King David's house-gowns. And there were more curtain-calls than the occasion seemed to warrant. Mr. Mason started to, then did not, make a speech!

Nevertheless, the ancient and dishonorable story went on and on, just as you find it written in the Second Book of Samuel. Only at greater length. David arose from off his bed and walked upon the roof and saw a woman bathing. And the woman was very beautiful. So David sent and inquired after the bather. And they said, "Is not this Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam, wife of Uriah?"

And sure enough it was! So David took her for his own, giving unto her a child. Then, summoning her husband, who was a loving captain in his army, David tried to double-cross him. But Uriah, even when in liquor, did not double-cross too easily. So David ordered him into battle to be killed. Then David comforted his widow, Bathsheba, who bore him another son, calling his name Solomon . . .

So endeth the story of "Bathsheba," which, in the James Mason acting version, opened last night at the Barrymore. First-nighters did not seem to mind it.

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Has Himself a Time

As David, penthouse pet of Jerusalem the Golden, James Mason plays with relish and a boyish yen for acting. In sumptuous housegowns designed by Edith Lutyens, on a regal lion's head couch sculptured by Milton Hebald, Mr. Mason has himself a time. So if his delivery is monotonous, his gestures stiff and studied, his obvious love of acting covers many an actorial omission.

Pamela Kellino, who, in what passes for their private lives, is Mrs. James Mason, is the Bathsheba of the title. She looks like a pleasant-spoken young English woman. And she seems quite fond of Mr. Mason. But it is Phil Arthur who, as Uriah, the not-so-bright young Hittite, is called upon to carry off the most trying apex of the David-Bathsheba-Uriah triangle. He succeeds.

Among the extra-triangular characters in the Jacques Deval play, Horace Braham stands out as David's ever-faithful Ghazil. Thomas Chalmers still plays Polonius under the name of Nathan. There are a couple of decorative singing concubines whose names escape me on the program and an equally decorative background supplied by Stewart Chaney. Coby Ruskin's direction leaves much to be desired...

James Mason, England's gift to America's movie-going womanhood, is correct when he says "Bathsheba" is nothing if not funny. It is not funny!